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# California Fish Kill Mounts After Poisoning by State

*Some Angry at Method for Stopping Predator of Salmon, Trout*

By Lou Cannon  
Special to The Washington Post

PORTOLA, Calif., Oct. 16—Thousands of dead and dying fish were scooped from the surface of picturesque Lake Davis today, poisoned by California wildlife officials in an effort to stop the voracious Northern pike from wiping out the state's trout and salmon fisheries.

The poisoning of this reservoir in the eastern foothills of the Sierra Nevada triggered an angry confrontation Wednesday between law enforcement officials and local residents, who depend upon the lake as their principal drinking supply. The state is providing an alternative source of drinking water to residents that will last for several months.

But today, only a handful of local residents from this nearby community of 2,500 watched grimly as state workers, in boats, began to skim dead pike, trout and other fish from the lake and load them into plastic bags. Officials said the cleanup process will take about 10 days.

State officials said the poisoning was necessary to prevent the pike from getting into nearby rivers and the mammoth Oroville Reservoir, which is a principal storage site for California's waterways. If this happened, they said, the pike would quickly destroy native species of rainbow trout and salmon. Pike are not native to the West and officials speculate they may have been introduced into the lake by a pike-loving fisherman, who didn't realize they would destroy the trout, for which this lake is famed. Dead pike easily outnumbered trout floating on the surface of the lake today.

"It's like the Alamo," said Tim Tyson, a

California highway patrolman, who was guarding Grizzly Dam, behind which the waters of the man-made Lake Davis are stored. "If the Northern pike got out of here, it's all over for the California fishery."

But opponents of the project, including local residents who for two years tried to block the state from poisoning the lake, saw a different kind of precedent.

"It's a disgrace for the state of California to put a known cancer-causing agent in the drinking water," said Fran Roudebush, who represents the Portola area on the Plumas County Board of Supervisors.

Roudebush said that while most local residents support the effort to rid the lake of the steel-jawed pike, they wanted to do so by using a pesticide that does not contain a known carcinogen. The state Fish and Game Department is using an older, powder form of the pesticide rotenone, which contains the cancer-causing ingredient trichloroethylene, or TCE.

The Environmental Protection Agency prohibits TCE from being used in pesticides manufactured today, but old supplies of rotenone that contain TCE may still be used. The poison causes all organisms that breathe through gills to suffocate.

Opponents of the Lake Davis project say that the Fish and Game Department is deliberately using old supplies of the chemical, when it could use pesticides that would kill the pike without destroying the drinking supply. They also accuse the Fish and Game Department of repeatedly misrepresenting the issue during a hearing on a failed lawsuit brought by local residents to stop the project.

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